

2017-04-01

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<http://hdl.handle.net/10026.1/9189>

Symbiosis

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This paper was finally accepted on January 13th, 2017. Publication date is 1st April 2017.

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‘Literary Performances’: Edward Kimber, the novel and natural knowledge in the eighteenth century

While on his American tour between 1742 and 1744, Edward Kimber, a young and ambitious editor and writer, heard the story of a six-year old boy who had been kidnapped in London, transported to North America, and sold into servitude. The story ends well: the child eventually marries the planter’s daughter and enjoys a happy life, while the miscreant captain who kidnapped and abused the boy is finally brought to justice. This compact sketch of human suffering and recovery first appears in the *London Magazine* (July 1746) as part of Kimber’s accounts of his transatlantic travels; this story sits alongside Kimber’s more expansive series of observations on the flora, fauna, climate, terrain and peoples of the North American colonies, which were published in the *London Magazine*, under the title ‘*Itinerant Observations in America*’ between 1745-46. I begin with this anecdote because it signals the value of a transatlantic perspective to discussions of eighteenth-century British literature. In the first instance, and most directly, the sketch becomes the enabling plot device for Kimber’s most enduring novel, *The History of the Life and Adventures of Mr Anderson* (1754). More substantially, however, Kimber’s published observations about the North American environment point to the transatlantic contexts of the relationship between literary form and natural historical concerns of the mid-eighteenth century. Using Kimber as a case-study, this article examines ways of seeing, knowing and ordering nature in the Atlantic world, with specific reference to Kimber’s use of literary form, in his *Relation, or Journal, of a late Expedition to the Gates of St Augustine, on Florida* (1744), the *Itinerant Observations in America*, and his novel, *Mr Anderson*.¹

¹ Kimber’s *Expedition to the Gates of St Augustine* (London 1744), a short pamphlet of thirty-six pages, details his military experiences in colonial Georgia and Florida under General James Oglethorpe’s command. *Itinerant Observations in America* is a series of accounts and observations which Kimber published in nine instalments between August 1745 and

Edward Kimber is not particularly well-known anymore and even in his heyday, in the 1740s and 50s, he didn't command an especially secure place in the reviews sections of literary magazines and journals. Only one of his novels, *The History of Joe Thompson* (1750), made it into the newly emerging canon of eighteenth-century novels compiled by James Harrison in *The Novelist's Magazine* catalogue (Taylor), and the reviewer of *Mr Anderson* (1754), the only novel of Kimber's which appears to have been reviewed in literary magazines, made clear that as an innovator of literary form this novelist had a long way to go: 'This is probably the work of a professed adventure-maker. Like the majority of our modern novels, it has little to commend it, besides a multiplicity of strange stories' ('Book Review').² The author of one of his obituaries noted that he was the 'Author of several Literary Performances', while another simply commented that he was 'well-known' in the literary world ('News', *St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post*; 'News', *London Chronicle*). And yet, despite the faintest of praise from reviewers and guardians of taste, Edward Kimber was a writer and editor of influence: he published eight novels (estimated to have gone through thirty-seven editions, collectively, with some of these editions published in German and French) (Kimber, *The History of the Life of Mr Anderson*, 9), he published accounts of his travels to North America in letters and pamphlets, he was a part-time editor for the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1752, and, in 1755, he succeeded his father as editor of the *London Magazine*. His significance as a popular novelist and editor of two significant periodicals should alert scholars to his ability to capture the tastes, interests and concerns of mid-eighteenth century readership.³ To date, a small body of work locates Kimber's literary significance on his sometimes radical exploration of slavery and rebellion in his novel, *Mr Anderson* (1754). Certainly, there is strong case to be made about the novel's transatlantic credentials through the lens of anti-slavery discourse.⁴ However, a more encompassing approach to Kimber's

December 1746. More recently, these fragments have been gathered together in one publication edited by Hayes. For ease of reference, I will refer to them as *Itinerant Observations* hereafter, and reference the letters through this edited publication.

² Also, Dickie notes: 'Edward Kimber's *Life and Adventures of Joe Thompson* (1750) is one of the great unacknowledged best-sellers of eighteenth-century fiction' (285).

³ For an early account of Kimber's publication record, see Black.

⁴ See Bannet, 115-125; Ebersole, 109-16.

literary career, one which addresses his transatlantic experiences and his ‘literary performances’ more fully, rests on the interplay between discourses of natural knowledge and narrative literary forms. While Kimber’s observations of North American nature provide nothing new in terms of discovering species of plants or animals, and his significance as an innovator of literary form was limited, his work does grapple with the absorption of current and emerging epistemological concerns, promoted in part by knowledge of this new natural environment, into popular literary forms.⁵

Kimber in North America: *Relation, or Journal of the late Expedition to the Gates of St Augustine, on Florida (1744) and Itinerant Observations (1745-46)*

During his tour of New York, Maryland, Virginia, Georgia and Florida, Kimber made efforts to record his experiences and published these accounts in London a few years later. Kimber’s interests and competencies in observing the North American natural environment, a fairly common preoccupation of travellers in this period, are articulated in these early works, providing the raw material for *Mr Anderson*, and establishing firmer claims to the relationship between literary form, natural knowledge and epistemological debates in the colonial Atlantic world.

Kimber’s *Expedition to the Gates of St Augustine* presents an account of his experiences as part of General James Oglethorpe’s detachment from Georgia in 1742. An overview of Oglethorpe’s military successes is presented in the introduction, which leads into a chronologically-framed account of Kimber’s experiences of military life, Native American people, local landscapes and terrain, and the local climate. In this account it is the environmental factors of Florida that shape and determine the structure and content of the text. As the men navigate waterways, push through sand and thicket, wade through creeks, and drain swamps, they come closer to the unseen Spanish forces, all of whom remain behind the gates of St Augustine, in fear of Oglethorpe’s troops, or so it is implied. If there is any threat

⁵ For an overview of the epistemological concerns of travel writing and its reporting of the natural world, see Thompson, *Travel Writing*, 62–95. For a more general discussion of epistemological concerns and debates, see Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in the Seventeenth Century*.

or jeopardy in this text it does not come from inter-colonial conflict, nor does it come from the potential for Native attack, quite the opposite in the latter case. Rather, the survival of the troops depends on their ability to negotiate the terrain and the climate. The imposition of order on an unfamiliar environment, in all its beautiful abundance or threatening danger, is the controlling aspect of this military narrative: Oglethorpe, the leader of the expedition, does this through first-hand lived experience and through learned diplomacy, and Kimber, through quite simple narrative conventions, imposes a different kind of order on the landscape.

The account begins with grandiose statements about the extreme hardships which the soldiers endure:

You will perceive, in the Course of my Letter, the various uncommon Hardships, our Way of making War in *America* subjects us to; Hardships equal to those, that Soldiers of *Cato* endur'd amongst the parch'd Sands of *Libya*; or those of *Charles XII.* among the dreary, frozen Forests of *Russia*; Hardships unknown, nor thought of, in your modish campaigns in *Flanders*. (4)

In this inhospitable climate, where the 'Fire of the Mid-day Sun' is 'succeeded with unwholesome noxious Dews, attended with Vermin of all Sorts', comfort is sought in a 'lofty Tree, or a Palmetto Shade', and water must be drunk from the 'first muddy Marsh-Water we can find' (4). Yet, in this environment, where soldiers are scorched by sun-darting beams (21) to the point where they are near 'barbequ'd' (24), survival is assured by Oglethorpe's good judgement:

His Excellency's Prudence and Conduct is highly to be admir'd in halting his Men at proper Times, in shady Places, where Water may be had; which, indeed, is the Secret of preserving Men in these hot Climates; and the contrary of which, perhaps, destroy'd so many in the *West-Indies*. (23)

Survival is also assured by the interventions of Native allies, 'Cowhati', or Coweta, in this case.⁶ On one desperate occasion, Kimber reports that 'our *Indians* discovered a fine, cool Spring, at the Root of a large Oak; the very Mention of which occasion'd several of our Men to desert their Arms and run towards it; for which, two of them were tied Neck and Heels, as

⁶ Kimber refers to the allies as the Cohwati; this is most likely a reference to the Coweta, who were based in the Southeast. See Swanton, *The Indians of the Southeastern United States*.

an Example to the rest' (27). The medicinal use of orange peel in their water bottles is also enabled by Native intervention: 'our Men found out the Contrivance of putting Orange-Peel into their Bottles, which temper'd the Water's Heat, and, by its generous Bitter, imparted a noble Warmth to the Stomach. The Oranges were found by the Indians, for they grow wild in this Country' (23). According to Kimber's representations, the physical health and well-being of the soldiers rests partly on Oglethorpe's experience and judgment and partly on Native knowledge of the natural environment. Oglethorpe's acts of diplomacy appear to go some way to acknowledge this debt: in his interactions with allied Native warriors who return to camp reporting that there is no Spanish camp at Diego, as had been assumed, Oglethorpe, sitting on a 'Buffalo's Skin, surrounded by his Officers' (18) affords them a formal greeting: 'he shook them by the Hand, welcom'd them home, in the *Indian* tongue, and thank'd them for the Service they had done him' (18).

This non-European military environment presents unique circumstances and exchanges to British soldiers: knowledge is borrowed from indigenous people and they are afforded diplomatic respect, meanwhile, British soldiers require a different kind of preparation for the challenges presented by this colonial landscape. Kimber notes that while it may seem 'odd in *Europe*' (11), '(j)oin'd to the Qualities of the good Soldier, and able Sailor, they are, also, expert Fishers and most excellent Huntsmen' (12). An ability to master the landscape and its people are crucial aspects of survival in this unfamiliar terrain and, of course, there is an implicit assertion of European superiority: Kimber asserts that Oglethorpe has 'tam'd' these '*Indian* hunting Warriors', assuming that the indigenous people of North America are 'of an ancient Roughness and Simplicity, common to all the first Inhabitants of the Earth; even our own dear Ancestors' (17).

Oglethorpe is the central, organising figure, leading the military expedition, and leading an endeavour to negotiate an inhospitable terrain and climate. He's also at the forefront of attempts to establish and maintain diplomatic links with local Native groups, the Cowhata specifically. In this context, knowledge of the colonial environment rests on first-hand experiences and on interactions with indigenous people, implicitly informing the complex ways in which the North American environment was seen, known, understood and ordered. There is an over-riding assumption in this pamphlet that the production of natural knowledge is aligned with the experiences and knowledge of long-term residents, soldiers like Oglethorpe, and local intermediaries, indigenous populations in this case; this assessment chimes with recent developments in the history of colonial science which notes the ways in

which local knowledge and Native knowledge is adopted into larger patterns of knowledge acquisition and dissemination.⁷

Much less attention, however, has been given to the literary dynamics of this process. The narrative trajectory of the *Expedition*, the framing of the there-and-back-again of one man's adventure, are a comfortable fit with the adventure novels of the period, and this trajectory also became part of the novels, like *Mr Anderson*, that Kimber wrote a few years later. In a story-telling context, natural knowledge is communicated through a sustained and trustworthy narrative voice, Kimber's own narrative persona, a familiar structuring device of many travel narratives of the period. In this account, and in contrast to more dispassionate accounts of the traveller's experience, nature, in this climate and terrain, is to be heroically overcome, becoming a transformative experience for the narrator and for the other members of the detachment. In this light, the processes of natural knowledge production can be traced to the role of the eye-witness reports, and experiential evidentiary modes of bearing witness, but processes of ordering and cataloguing this natural world is equally supported by common features of story-telling, including: the narrative arc of the adventure novel, the episodic traits of the picaresque tradition, and the final, transformative experiences of the protagonist.

A similar assessment might be made of Kimber's second foray into his descriptions of the natural world, his *Itinerant Observations*. Again, he offers a first-hand account of his travels to and around North America and, in line with many other travel narratives of the period, he offers descriptive accounts of the land and climate, providing extensive detail on colonial and native dwellings and traditions. Specifically, he maps out the military presence, various forms of housing, animals (from insects to alligators), food, waterways, Native communities and traditions, religions, education, details about the climate, about slavery and servitude,

⁷ The ways in which individual testimony and discovery are either fed into hierarchical systems of knowledge construction, or circulated in and through more informal structures of knowledge exchange, have dominated the field of colonial science in recent years. See James Delbourgo and Nicholas Dew, ed., *Science and Empire in the Atlantic World*; Bauer, *The Cultural Geography of Colonial American Literatures: Empire, Travel, Modernity*; Safier, 'Itineraries of Atlantic Science: New Questions, New Approaches, New Directions'; Jardine, Secord and Spary, *Cultures of Natural History*.

currency, as well as the location of various towns in and around New York, Maryland, Virginia and Georgia. In all, Kimber compresses his eye-witness observations of the physical and human geography of the North American colonies in to short, condensed, anonymous accounts. But Kimber's narrative is so much more than a linear eye-witness natural historical account in the tradition of Thomas Harriot, John Lawson or Robert Beverly. Indeed, Kimber goes to great lengths to construct his experience in literary terms: the introductory section from an 'anonymous' source acquaints the reader with the 'young gentleman' whose 'voyages and travels' are about to be revealed, and the final instalment, appearing in 1746, closes the correspondence with the same authoritative voice and overview ('To the AUTHOR of the LONDON MAGAZINE'). This 'anonymous' source acts as an anchor for the fragments which, he insists, will be delivered as received, without additional 'Order or Connection'. The literary ruse is that the descriptions and accounts of the North American geo-political landscape are delivered to the 'Author of the London Magazine', by an anonymous contributor, who has 'prevailed upon' this young gentleman to provide 'Descriptions of the most remarkable Places he has visited', in advance of the young gentleman's '*New and Curious Observations*', which he is purportedly preparing for 'Press' (*Itinerant Observations in America*, 26). While Kimber may well have been preparing a more substantial piece of work it never comes to fruition, so far as recent scholarship can tell, and the deliberate artifice of the framing structure is meaningfully interpreted as a mechanism to establish the credibility and veracity of the account contained within. It would have been much simpler, of course, to declare ownership of the material by attaching his name to the accounts, thereby establishing credibility through his eye-witness accounts. Instead, Kimber chooses to stabilise his observations on the flora, fauna and climate of the natural world within a recognisable literary form.

In the first set of letters to be published, Kimber's narrative persona declares:

My Mind will ever retain the Diversity of Scenes that presented to our admiring Eyes in this Passage; and now I endeavour to commit some faint Sketches of them to Paper, I am lost, methinks, in the prodigious Confusion of Objects, that all at once crowd before me, romantically pleasing, and, as it were, make Imagination sick with Wonder.
(30)

The sheer abundance of this environment is overwhelming, and the narrator supplies a kind of order to the chaos of this immersive experience by providing a two-page narrative list,

with details of geographic features, grottoes, ‘hoary Woods’, marshes and savannahs, enough natural produce to supply a ‘Paradisiacal Banquet’, together with an account of ‘Millions of the changeable Lizard’, ‘Banks of Oysters appear(ing) like frightful Rocks’, and the ‘dreadful Alligator’, who ‘sports himself in the Canes’ (30/31). Kimber’s imposition of order on this new natural environment reflects the early modern process of cataloguing, listing and quantifying the natural world.⁸ His methods in this instance are perhaps a little dated by the 1740s. After all, following Linnaeus’ interventions in taxonomy in the 1730s, the tradition of listing, cataloguing and describing nature, was being replaced with a more systematic process of naming and classification according to a number of pre-selected characteristics. The apparent limitlessness of the catalogue was structured into a chain, a series and latterly, towards the middle to end of the eighteenth century, into a network of nature that allowed individual elements to be mapped into a coherent whole.⁹ While Kimber hasn’t quite worked out how to fully articulate the new taxonomies of nature in this travel account, nonetheless, his work does reflect fundamental epistemological concerns about how nature, and natural knowledge, should be shaped and disseminated in popular discourse. And, importantly, he does close this particular two-page cacophony of natural phenomena and specimens by imposing order over the ‘Multitude of Sounds’, the ‘Tumult and Cries’, that appear to echo in the approaching dawn:

What glaring Eyes are those in the neighbouring Thicket, that beam Fire upon us? –
we present our Pieces, -- we fire, and the whole Country echoes back the Groans. –
Streaks of Red and Gold paint the Skies, and now Sol just arises from the Ocean, and
is confess’d in our Horizon. (31)

This complete cycle, which has presented ‘Nature, in all its gay Varieties’ (30) in the day time, giving way to new ‘Scenes of Wonder’ and the ‘bespangled’ ‘glittering Sparks’ of the firefly in the night time (31), is closed with a final, deafening gunshot as the new sun rises. Symbolically, at least, Kimber’s aim is to impose order on this chaotic and unfamiliar natural landscape: firstly, by listing and describing as many elements as possible, and, secondly, by

⁸ See Ogilvie, ‘The Many Books of Nature: Renaissance Naturalists and Information Overload’.

⁹ See Rieppel, ‘The Series the Network and the Tree: Changing Metaphors on the Order of Nature’.

establishing the temporal limits of a full day and night, which has the effect of setting interpretive boundaries around the subject matter.

The politics of nature as they developed in the colonial Atlantic world in the long eighteenth century are also presciently revealed:

To make a good Horesman in *America*, is no easy Matter, without considerable Practice; and Accidents often happen to the best of us, by the Intricacies of the Tracts and Paths. The Horses are the most hardy Beasts imaginable, and tho' they can't all size with *European* Horses, they make it out in Service.' (29/30)

As well, Kimber comments on the fact that American rabbits are more like European hares (33). Debates about the size and scale of European and American mammals would become much more heated in the decades to come, culminating in the famous exchanges between Le Comte de Buffon and Thomas Jefferson. At this relatively early stage in what Antonella Gerbi has called the 'dispute of the New World', these examples show that popular literary forms and the popular press were absorbing important aspects of these epistemological concerns, from the details of qualitative comparative analysis, to more overarching strategies of knowing, ordering and disseminating natural knowledge (Gerbi; Cañizares-Esguerra). While Kimber does not ascribe to Linnaean taxonomies in a literal way, the processes of ordering, shaping and limiting the natural environment are readily present and define what I describe as a popular narrativisation of epistemological concerns.

By and large, literary scholars have been slow to acknowledge and assess the ways in which epistemological debates are supported and made manifest in popular literary forms. To date, concentration on the individual experience and eye-witness accounts in non-literary texts has focused attention on projects that largely analyse the politics of cultural identity.¹⁰ Despite the

¹⁰ Pagden's attention to eye-witness accounts and the autoptic imagination in *European Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism*, and Pratt's definition of the 'contact zone' in *Imperial Eyes*, have each had many followers, and cultural readings of travel narratives or natural history narratives have blossomed as a result. But these studies rarely pay attention to novels and prose-fictions of the period; more often, they analyse non-literary texts by literary means. Also see Regis, *Describing Early America: Bartram*,

merit of this approach, the result has been to draw attention away from the literary manifestations of epistemological debates about the ‘ordering of things’ in ‘everyday’ culture and popular reading materials of the transatlantic world, particularly in the periodical press and the novel.¹¹

The significance of Kimber’s contribution to British literature does not lie in the politics of identity, although he is very aware of the politics shaping Atlantic and colonial discourse at the time; rather, his contribution to mid-eighteenth century British literary studies rests on his ability to absorb epistemological debates and concerns, prompted in part by the new environments of the New World, into common literary forms. As noted already, *Itinerant Observations* is framed by an anonymous recipient, opening and closing the account in a neat artifice of the epistolary tradition, but Kimber further employs an overarching, picaresque narrative arc: a curious and intelligent young man sets out on his travels, experiences all kinds of twists and turns of fate and bad luck, and offers, at times, a melodramatic rendering of his experiences of the North American colonies. He ends his journey, dramatically rescued from extreme want starvation (64/5), by nature’s good fortune, emerging a much wiser, grateful, more mature individual, and the ‘chain of the Narration’ is complete (‘To the AUTHOR of the LONDON MAGAZINE’, 623). On more than one occasion he becomes lost, on land and sea, and he witnesses the deaths of several slaves and crew members through exposure to the cold weather (43). As is the case with the earlier *Expedition* narrative, guns may fire and military conflict may break out, but the real jeopardy in the text comes from environmental factors. The new climate presents the greatest threat to the British traveller, not Native or European conflict, and the environment must be heroically overcome by the brave adventurer. But this narrator is also a man of sensibility and feeling, appreciating the picturesque beauty of his surroundings. In the final assessment, the overall impact of the

Jefferson, Crèvecoeur and the Rhetoric of Natural History. One recent exception in this field is Sivills’s *American Environmental Fiction, 1782–1847*, which identifies the ways in which proto-environmental fiction addressed some of these epistemological debates in the literature of the early Republic.

¹¹ For further reading, see Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.

accounts is to articulate and shape a transformational journey of a young man of feeling, partly through his responses to his lived experiences of danger and fortitude, and partly by quoting liberally from Milton, Rabelais, Pope and Addison. It's also worth noting Kimber's indebtedness to Richard Lewis, whose poem, 'A journey from Patapsco in Maryland to Annapolis' (1730), Kimber read while on his North American travels.¹² Kimber secures his literary pretensions throughout the project by invoking the framing devices and transformative impulses of popular novelistic structures; ultimately, nature is seen, known, and ordered through a literary lens.

Mr Anderson: the intermediary and the networked wilderness

Two of Kimber's novels, *The Life and Adventures of Joe Thompson* (1750), as well as *The History of the Life and Adventures of Mr. Anderson* (1754), are concerned, to varying degrees, with the political forces which shaped the Atlantic world. *Joe Thompson* uses transatlantic trade in linen and tobacco, references to the slave trade, as well as the Atlantic trade triangle of England, Oporto and Virginia, to encircle the narrative of adventure and courtship that lies within. In *Mr Anderson*, the kidnap and transportation across the Atlantic of the young Thomas Anderson, from London to a plantation in Maryland, his experiences of indentured servitude, his transition to freedom on the frontier, and his final return to his parents in London many years later, provide the substantive fabric of story. In each of these novels, Kimber taps into popular stock characters and elaborate plot structures, endeavouring to respond to popular tastes by writing about courtship, the tumultuous nature of economic ruin, social disgrace, and the gradual rise back to financial security and respectability. The novels fit easily into the picaresque tradition: each one follows the growth and development of a

¹² Kimber writes, 'And, indeed, I can't help every now and then, taking him (Lewis) out of my Pocket in this Country; for his descriptive Part is just and fine, and such a Warmth of Sentiment, such a delicate Vein of Poetry, such an unaffected Piety runs thro' the Whole, that I esteem it one of the best Pieces extant' (*Itinerant Observations*, 52). For comment on Richard Lewis, his work and influence, see Carlson, 'Richard Lewis and the Reception of the His work in England'; Lemay, 'Richard Lewis and Augustan American Poetry'.

young boy, challenged by a complex and unforgiving social world; each protagonist overcomes adversity, becomes financially secure, socially superior, and ends the novel a happily married young man.

With respect to *Mr Anderson* particularly, Tom's experiences of North America, beginning with the slave plantation through to the open borders of the frontier, provides the context for his survival and transformation. Stripped of agency while a servant and then a slave on the Barlow plantation, situated twenty miles inland from Senepuxon (or Sinepuxent), he is, however, educated in secret by Mrs Barlow, the planter's wife, and Mr Ferguson, a Scottish surgeon, each of whom provides him with the rudiments of an academic education and rules of social etiquette.¹³ Barlow (who purchased Tom as a child) is horrified to find that Tom and Fanny (Barlow's daughter) wish to marry and, in a bid to separate them permanently, he sells Tom to Matthewson, an Indian trader who has 'settled in several of the *Indian* nations at the back of *Virginia*, for above twenty years' (92) and is noted for his extensive knowledge of the French, British and Indian borderlands. Tom's transformational experience comes when Matthewson teaches him about his business and the ways and means of life on the edge of the frontier; they initially travel to Virginia through Northampton county, Matthewson has trading partners in Williamsburg and Jamestown, and for four years they trade and travel around the territories of the Creek and under occasional threat from the French and Indian allies in the Ohio Valley. From the intermediary 'frontier' man, Matthewson, whose knowledge of the geo-political terrain shapes Tom's own survival and transformation, to the embedded story of a Native American couple, Calcathouy and Taloufa, this middle section of the novel presents as a space where local knowledge, both environmental and political, is shared and exchanged between characters to beneficial effect. In this respect, through Matthewson's role as an intermediary and teacher, Kimber's novel creates a fictional

¹³ More precise details concerning the location of narrative include the fact that Fanny had a dance teacher from Annapolis (69); Mr Barlow has regular business on the western shore of Virginia; and, with Barlow away for weeks at a time, the family enjoy 'halcyon days with good folks at *Senepuxon*' (68).

counterpoint to what recent scholars of colonial science have defined as a networked wilderness.¹⁴

Matthewson immediately releases Tom from his bondage, admiring his ‘talents’ and ‘integrity’ (92), and offers him his own name and business in the process. Within a short period of time, and as Tom Matthewson now, the protagonist transforms himself from a plantation servant and slave, into a broker of knowledge and power in the ‘back settlements’ of the French / Indian borders:

¹⁴ The network model of colonial science has become commonplace in recent years: specifically, the relationship between the metropolitan centre and the colonial periphery, the figure of the intermediary, or ‘go-between’, challenge prevailing notions of authority and expertise. Rather than follow a diffusionist and hierarchical model of colonial science, whereby metropolitan centres in Europe dominate and determine the value of knowledge from the so-called periphery, a model with Bruno Latour accommodates, new approaches to colonial science track and map the interconnectedness of knowledge transfer around the Atlantic by asserting the expertise and authority of colonial or creole fieldworkers and / or scientists. As well, the value of ‘pre-owned’ knowledge from native, slave, creole or female subjects or communities, is also part and parcel of this eighteenth-century Atlantic world of natural knowledge production. See Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists Through Society*; Kellman, ‘Nature, networks, and expert testimony in the colonial Atlantic: The case of cochineal’; Delbourgo, ‘Fugitive Colours: Shaman’s Knowledge, Chemical Empire and Atlantic Revolutions’; Parrish, *American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World*, especially chapter 6, ‘Indian Sagacity’ (215-258), and chapter 7, ‘African Magi, Slave Poisoners’ (259-306). The term ‘networked wilderness’, follows Matt Cohen’s use of the term in *The Networked Wilderness: Communicating in Early New England*.

In their journey, of near three hundred miles, through this beautiful, but wild and uncultivated country, he became quite expert in the methods of traveling, living, camping, and hunting; and, before he arrived at their first station, was as complete a woodsman as *Matthewson* himself, who beheld with delight and pride his ready proficiency.[. . .]

It is amazing with what facility *Tom* learned the *Creek* dialect, which is the general speech for trade throughout the several nations. (94)

Kimber's protagonist, whose identity has shifted so often from a 'foundling', a 'wretch', a 'wanderer', a 'purchased slave' (71), to a slave overseer (as a form of banishment to a distant Barlow plantation), to a freeman, a trader, and a complete woodsman with working knowledge of local Native language, accommodates the traits of the intermediary figures that helped establish networks of knowledge in North American colonies and territories. W. Gordon Milne, in his early but significant contribution to Kimber scholarship, notes the sounds of the 'mock birds' and the 'bull-frogs' as Tom experiences the 'gay savannah' or the 'open meadow', as well as Fanny's account of the Carter plantation, which provides a vivid impression of wealth and slavery in colonial North America (248-49).¹⁵ As noted already, Kimber provides no new information with regards to flora and fauna, and even makes some errors in his descriptions of certain plants in certain parts of colonial America, but he does offer a glimpse of the role of the intermediary in this relatively new geo-political environment. Specifically, Matthewson dispatches Tom to establish alliances with local Native groups, in preparation for an attack against a group of Indians allied with the French who have

¹⁵ Milne also provides a map of the 'Approximate location of the principal scenes in History of Mr Anderson' (243).

ransacked his store in the ‘Twightwee’ nation.¹⁶ Tom also uses his power to release a French prisoner of war, the son of the Marquis du Cayle, governor of Moville, ‘without ransom’ (109), reckoning that this act of personal kindness will result in future acts of diplomacy between the British and the French: ‘Let my generosity make you a friend to any *English* subject, you may see a captive with your nation’ (109/10).

Intimate knowledge of local culture and environment is further elaborated in another embedded and parallel story about Calcathouy and Taloufa, a story that is told to Tom by Matthewson while they wait in the undergrowth in preparation for an attack on the French and their Indian allies. Calcathouy is the son of a powerful Mico, or leader, who follows his father’s example and performs ‘the war dance with grace and propriety’; he knows ‘all the retreats of the woods, for some hundred miles round, was nimble as his fellow native the deer, was the most expert marksman with his gun, would transfix the smallest of the feathered race with his arrows, was practised in all their stratagems of war’ (98). Further,

he was a huntsman that no prey could escape; the swift-footed buck, and the heavy buffaloe became his ready prey, and the fish of every lake seemed to croud (*sic*) to his suspending hook; and, in debates, either relating to the improvements of peace, or the mediated ravages of war, outstripped the wisdom of the greyest old man. (98)

The figure of the noble savage is presented in plentiful detail, and his knowledge of the terrain and of local politics is assured. His nobility is reflected in the passion and courage of his wife, Taloufa: she is taken captive but kills Marsillac, the French military leader responsible for her imprisonment. Mistakenly believing Calcathouy to be dead, she kills herself rather than suffer further punishment at the hands of her captors.

¹⁶ Milne notes: “‘Twightwee’ was the name by which the early English writers usually designated the tribe of Miami Indians [. . .]. The Miami first appeared at the southern end of Lake Michigan. After 1711 colonies were sent out to the eastward, and settlements were formed on the Miami River in Ohio, where Miamis remained until 1763. Thus, one can assume that Captain Matthewson’s store in the “Twightwee nation” was located in the Ohio region’ (‘A Glimpse of Colonial America’, 245 n.17).

The parallels between the two men, Tom and Calcathouy, are quite obvious: each one learns from and follows their father, or in Tom's case with Matthewson, his father-figure; each one develops knowledge and expertise of the wilderness; and they both secure the love of a brave woman, a partner of equitable virtue and nobility (Fanny is prepared to die rather than submit to the lustful desires of another man). The comparison between the two speaks to the growth of Tom's nobility, his newly acquired knowledge of the wilderness, and his readiness for battle in this relatively unfamiliar landscape. Matthewson is the knowledge broker in this respect: he teaches Tom how to trade and survive in the American colonies, and he also imparts Calcathouy's story, shoring up Tom's ability to discriminate between competing Native and colonial forces in the North American landscape.

Following the revelation of this story and their patient wait in the undergrowth, hidden effectively by nature's provisions, felled pines and palmettos in this case, a battle of 'perfect butchery' (106) with the French and their Indian allies ensues, lasting six hours and leaving many casualties, including Matthewson.¹⁷ In the wake of Matthewson's death, Tom assumes control of his business interests, a suitable mantle to bear as Tom has, by now, learned from Matthewson the intricacies and politics of frontier life. Tom is now in a position to enact that knowledge and survive on his own; once he acquires Matthewson's estate, he frees the slaves and asks the three gentlemen upon whom he has bestowed much of Matthewson's business to employ former servants and slaves in 'service at proper wages' (112).

On his own again in the hope of returning to his beloved Fanny in Maryland, one of the first markers of his successful transition into Matthewson's role as broker and intermediary in this frontier landscape is his hunt for deer and buffaloe, 'in the manner of the people, with whose customs he was as familiar as our own' (112). His ability to mediate between cultures in this North American landscape becomes even more important when he is captured by the Ocuni

¹⁷ Mason and Mason, editors of *Mr Anderson*, note that Kimber uses what he knows of the landscape in quite a generic ways: he is able to offer an accurate botanical description of the palmetto in a note, but he extends the prevalence of this plant to all parts of colonial America, rather than the area south of the Chesapeake (97n).

who are allied with the French and as such are an enemy to Tom.¹⁸ With his understanding of Native languages he is able to discern that he is to be taken captive to Moville, where he'll be handed to the French as a prisoner. By speaking Creek to his captors they show 'pleased surprise to hear him talk a language they understood' (113) and, as a consequence, they unbind him and he entertains them with his flute. The results are predictably effective:

they made the most ridiculous gestures of astonishment, then snatch'd the tuneful instrument, surveyed it on all sides, attempted to blow ineffectually, and then applied to him to tell him how, particularly their chief. He shewed him how to place his lips and his tongue, and when he made a sound, he danced about in the utmost triumph. Seeing him so fond of it, he took an effectual method for his preservation and good treatment, by presenting it to him with these words – you are my friend – yes, the other returned, putting his hand upon his head, and you shall be mine, making him at the same time, a present of a painted *Tomohawk* (or small *Indian* battle-axe). This is so sacred a compact amongst the *Indians*, that it is never broken, and they think themselves obliged to protect their friend in any evil danger. He then enquired in the *French* tongue, if he understood him, and found he talked that language intelligibly. (113)

In this thoroughly romanticised commentary on captivity among the Indians, it is, nevertheless, Tom's ability to mediate in Creek and in French, which makes for a positive outcome. His cultural brokerage with the Ocuni, through their apparent fascination with forms of music and instruments that are radically new to them, allows Tom to use his flute as a bargaining chip. He brokers their good favour to such an extent that they reciprocate the gift, which Tom accepts and understands with good grace. Using all he has learned from Matthewson during his four years traversing this cultural landscape, Tom fulfils his role as a mediator and a broker, both linguistically and culturally. The wilderness of the novel

¹⁸ Milne suggests that Kimber had in mind the Oconee or Oconi tribe, from Georgia, when he referenced the Ocuni: 'In this instance it would seem that Kimber again drew upon his actual experience in Georgia and consequently misplaced his local color, the Oconi Creeks being an entirely Southern tribe which would not be found in the Ohio-Virginia region' ('A Glimpse of Colonial America', 252 n. 32).

becomes networked: literally networked, as Tom is being moved south and then north, to the French fort Menville,¹⁹ and later to Quebec, in a process of prisoner transfer between the allied Indians and the French, and figuratively networked, through these symbolic interactions and exchanges.

This network also extends across the Atlantic, again, by the very nature of Tom's second enforced transportation across the Atlantic, to France this time as prisoner to the French, then to England where he is reunited with his parents, to Maryland, where he finally marries Fanny, and back home to England to live the rest of his life in familial happiness. The Atlantic journeys are key to the trajectory of the plot, but Atlantic politics are also played out on colonial territory. Just before the skirmish in which Matthewson dies, the local implications of the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) are compared with the official, national position of peace principally between France and England:

Notwithstanding the peace of *Utrecht* of the year 1713, the designing *French* underhandedly kept up the animosity between their *Indians*, and those attached to the *English*.... The *British American* governors, particularly those of *Virginia* and *Carolina*, ordered our people, on their side, to repel force by force, so that though there was peace between the two crowns, a hot *Indian* war was carried on in that part of the world. (95/96)

The geo-politics of Kimber's colonial landscape compresses the tensions of territorial claims between competing Indian tribes with the imperial designs of the British and the French crowns. When Matthewson dies, Tom takes on the mantle of the intermediary and cultural broker, picking his way through the figurative and physical borderlands of colonial North America. Tom's experiential knowledge of people, languages and environment afford him a privileged position which allows him to mediate and traverse an inter-connected and largely unpredictable landscape. Through the protagonist, epistemological concerns about ways

¹⁹ The editors of *Mr Anderson* note that this was the first French settlement in Louisiana, situated in present-day Mobile, Alabama (96n). Again, Kimber appears to misrepresent the extent of the distance between present-day Mobile and Quebec, but on his arrival in Quebec, he comments that he had never seen so 'populous and sumptuous a city' (115), offering a stark contrast to the plantation and frontier life that he has lived so far.

seeing, knowing and ordering the geo-political landscape of North American are neatly absorbed into popular narrative form.

Conclusion

The literary methods of Kimber's early travels and true relations – the first-person narrative construction, the deliberate selection and re-ordering of events to provide a narrative of adventure, discovery, jeopardy, fear and, finally, safety – recall traditional narrative trajectories and structures that he later employed in *Mr Anderson*. Through the survivalist adventure in colonial North America, we can read an 'ordering of nature' which engages with debates about place, knowledge, authority and control, situating his novel, his pamphlet and periodical publications, within a larger, emerging cultural debate about ways of knowing and ordering new world nature.

The relationship between natural history writing and the novel is not new; Michael McKeon notes the significant influence of natural histories, and other kinds of narratives, on the development of the novel quite comprehensively in *The Origins of the English Novel*. For my purposes here, it's worth noting that the novel forms at a time when the so-called narrative 'plain-ness' of the natural history is associated with the value of truth, transparency and 'documentary authenticity' (McKeon, 108–109). As well, Robert James Merrett notes the anthropocentric and scientifically empirical methods at play in the novels of Defoe, Fielding, Richardson and Austen. Instead of supplying further evidence of this one-way traffic, where histories and empirical science feed the growth of the emerging novel form, the emphasis of this study has been to establish a more dynamic relationship between literary form and natural historical work, such that literary devices can be seen to shape and articulate ways of seeing, knowing and ordering the natural world.

As an experienced traveller, writing about the natural world, and as an editor who re-printed translated fragments of Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle* (c 1749-1788) and published commentary on the reception of Buffon's ideas, in the *London Magazine*, Kimber's eighteenth-century publications should be interpreted in a transatlantic framework that accommodates epistemological debates about nature.²⁰ Kimber's temporal positioning in this debate, at a

²⁰ References to Buffon's work: 'Letter' *London magazine* (Apr 1748; 'To the AUTHOR of the LONDON MAGAZINE' *London magazine*, (Jun 1750): 245-246; 'To the AUTHOR of the LONDON MAGAZINE,'

point of threshold concerning fundamental changes to the processing of natural knowledge, from the ever-expanding catalogues of nature of the early modern period, to taxonomies and categories of nature devised by Linnaeus in the 1730s, places him at a critical, epistemological juncture. The extent to which Kimber responds to debates about seeing, knowing and ordering natural knowledge are, as I've demonstrated, implicitly present in his fiction and non-fiction accounts of colonial North America, through his intermediary figures, his construction of a networked wilderness, and his endeavours to impress an order on the apparent chaos of new expansive and expanding landscapes of North America.

To conclude, my intention has been to develop an analysis of these different prose forms, the novel and natural historical texts, broadly conceived, simultaneously, acknowledging the fact that they evolved together in the eighteenth century. Importantly, much of this convergence is prompted by the new knowledge that the colonial environment offered the transatlantic traveller. Through his role as an editor, a novelist, a traveller, and as a contributor to the periodical press, Kimber's work shines a light on the ways in which epistemologies of science and nature took into account new material and information from the new world. In Kimber, we also find a writer who assesses the ways in which *literary* modes and methods contributed to the means by which natural knowledge was understood and disseminated in the long eighteenth century.

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